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## THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF PAUL.

### VII. THE FAMILY.

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THE conception of the church as a fraternity within the Roman empire makes it easy to appreciate the teaching of Paul upon the details of social life. He was setting up an ideal, not of what society in general should attempt to realize, but of what the members of the church should consider the proper customs for themselves. Thus his teaching in each department of social life is affected both by practical considerations resulting from the actual environment in which the Christian life was to be lived, and also by the regulative conceptions of his eschatology. To understand his teachings concerning the family, both of these facts must be duly estimated.

#### SECTION I. PAULINE ETHIC TREATS MARRIAGE AS A SECONDARY GOOD.

The family did not originate with Christianity. So far as we know, apostolic Christianity did not attempt any change in its form or ceremonies in the different countries into which it spread. Yet this by no means is to be interpreted as arguing that Paul approved of the Græco-Roman moralists in matters relating to the sexes. On the contrary, it is patent that he found in heathen society a distinct danger to the pure life which the Christian should attempt to live. In fact, the greatest danger that threatened the new communities lay in the social ideals and customs that prevailed throughout the Græco-Roman world.

Thanks to the over-zealous efforts of certain apologetes, we have grown so accustomed to the portrayals of the depravity of the heathen society of the first century that it is difficult to realize that an empire that had yet hundreds of years to live, and was not to reach its greatest prosperity for a century, was

neither decrepit nor rotten. Especially hard is it to realize the simple distinction between the capital and the provinces, and to believe that throughout the provinces there was a sturdy, self-respecting middle class which, however its members may have enjoyed occasional gladiatorial sports, was yet maintaining a conventional domestic morality by no means greatly inferior to that of any modern nation. Just as the letters of Pliny tell of beautiful home life among the official class in the capital, the gravestones are noble defenders of *bourgeois* morals. Men were not all like the heroes of Petronius and Apuleius, and women were not all like that notorious matron who counted years by her husbands rather than by the consuls. Throughout the empire there was developing a new conception of the rights of married women. Gradually they had passed out from the restrictions of the old *in manu* marriage and were permitted to study, if not to practice, learned professions, to control their own property, and in many other ways to break from the restraints set by the old conceptions of the subjection of the wife to the husband. All this disturbed the minds of conservatives of those days, just as similar tendencies disturb conservatives in the present day. For those who were admirers of old Roman ideals, as many of the fashionable writers profess themselves, there was indeed sufficient ground for lamentation ; yet, nevertheless, the emancipation of women advanced steadily. It even possibly aided the Christian conception of the ideal position of women as one of equality with men. But, unfortunately, the abolition of restraints seems to have been followed by no moral uplift. Alongside of this emancipation of women of the wealthier classes there persisted the old ideas of the veniality of sexual impurity on the part of men, as well as a growing tendency to divorce. The upper classes were not marrying, and the number of children in case of marriage was growing less, notwithstanding the government's effort to check the evil by the establishment of privileges for those who had three children. What was worse, there was springing up a sort of legalized concubinage that was neither prostitution nor marriage.

In addition to these tendencies in the Græco-Roman family,

there was also the recognition of prostitution as an element in the social life of all cities. It is impossible to go into this matter in detail, but the readers of the polite literature of the empire know only too well how heathen society regarded the matter. If few Roman philosophers would take the position of Cato, they seldom censured the practices he advised. The other and nameless form of licentiousness, which played such havoc in the moral system even of a Socrates, was not only prevalent, but actually a matter of academic debate. Plutarch has a lengthy dialogue as to the relative merits of the love of boys and the love of women.<sup>1</sup> Such a fact as this makes very evident the public opinion in the midst of which the first gentile churches sprang up. Practices like these, abhorrent though they were to Jewish and Christian morality, were sharply distinguished by the ethical writers of the day from lust and ignoble passion of all sorts. No one would accuse Plutarch, for instance, of favoring orgies or debauchery. Temperance, or self-control, was the greatest of personal virtues both for him and for all men of his type. But chastity on the part of men was a matter of preference—a practice of a semi-ascetic morality. Confusing as are the implications of such a statement, the historical student must admit that the great and good men of the Greek and Roman type distinguished marital faithlessness from prostitution, and regarded what today would be considered licentiousness as morally neutral. That such a conception ever was outgrown must be laid largely to the credit of the Christian teaching we are considering. Chastity of both men and women, not merely the maintenance of the married vow, was an ideal of all Christian teachers. The triumph of this ideal is a tribute to the wisdom of those called to confront a problem which at the outset must have appeared all but insoluble.

A second fact that gave the early Christians difficulty as regards marriage was the Christian teaching itself. Jesus himself had taught that in the swiftly approaching kingdom men were neither to marry nor to give in marriage, but were to be like the angels.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he had even said that unless a man hated his

<sup>1</sup> *Morals* (Eng. trans.), "On Love."

<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:24. "The sons of God, children of the resurrection," Luke 20:36.

father and mother he could not be his disciple.<sup>3</sup> Paul, with his persistent emphasis upon the "flesh" as the point of attack of sin, must have deepened the uncertainty of his converts as to the rightfulness of maintaining, much more entering upon, matrimony. The matter became so vital that the Corinthian church wrote to the apostle for light.<sup>4</sup> Should Christians marry, and, if married, should they live together as husband and wife? If one of the married pair were not a Christian, should the marriage be broken?

These were the questions forced upon the church by both its social environment and its own teachings. The answer that Paul makes to them is clearly determined by his general conception of the relation of the Christian to the world and the kingdom, and by his belief in the shortness of the time to elapse before Christ returned. It will be found *in extenso* in 1 Cor., chap. 7. His positions may thus be stated: (*a*) marriage is a lawful thing for the Christian; (*b*) it is to be justified wholly from the side of physical appetite, as a sort of prophylactic against licentiousness;<sup>5</sup> (*c*) for those who are able to withstand appetite, celibacy is preferable, since, if married, they will be likely to be more devoted to their husbands or wives than to the Lord; (*d*) the general position governing his teaching, he frankly says,<sup>6</sup> was not obtained from any teaching of Jesus, but is given as his own opinion (*γνώμη*), as one who had received mercy from the Lord to be trustworthy. How far he was governed in this teaching by his eschatology is evident.<sup>7</sup> "By reason of the present distress [*i. e.*, in the storm and stress period before the reappearance of the Christ] it is good for a man to be as he is."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Luke 14:26.

<sup>4</sup> The suggestion of RAMSAY, *Historical Commentary on Corinthians*, *in loco*, that the Corinthians were considering universal marriage as a panacea for the prevalent morality, can hardly be considered seriously. See MASSIE, *Journal of Theological Studies*, July, 1901, pp. 527, 528.

<sup>5</sup> Yet even in marriage the husband and wife are to live apart occasionally for religious growth, 1 Cor. 7:5.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. 7:25.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. 7:26.

<sup>8</sup> TEICHMANN, *Die paulinische Vorstellung von Auferstehung und Gericht*, p. 20, holds, on the basis of 4 Esdras 5:8, that Paul advises against marriage because of the

Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned." Thus, again, it appears that Paul does not regard it as any part of his work as an apostle to develop a philosophy of marriage, or, in fact, any social program, for persons who are so soon to be living in conditions in which only the spiritual elements of life are to survive. Marriage he regards as a temporary institution, to pass away with the age.<sup>9</sup>

Yet it would be a serious injustice to the Pauline thought to leave the matter here. One must consider, also, the closely allied theme of chastity, so unavoidably forced into notice by any study of the social conditions in which apostolic Christianity developed. As we should expect, here is no mere balancing of two possible goods; far less a recognition of the moral possibility of any such question as that debated by Plutarch. No writer ever struck out more boldly at that laxity which, to modern eyes, is the worst feature of the civilization of his day. The most superficial reader of the opening chapter of Romans feels the heat of Paul's hatred of heathen vice. The matter in his treatment becomes one of the supremacy of the spiritual life, and the supremacy of the moral imperative found in the nature of that life. Brushing aside all casuistry, he puts the case frankly: it is a choice between living after the flesh and reaping corruption, or of living after the Spirit and reaping eternal life.<sup>10</sup> The fornicator cannot enter the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> Thus even here there is no appeal to law, either of Moses or of Jesus. The Christian must be pure because he is a Christian. Social ethics were never more directly based upon religion. No man could appeal to higher motives. Marcus Aurelius might summon the thought general belief that childbirth would be especially dangerous during the period preceding the advent of the Christ. Such a view is by no means impossible, and becomes the more probable when one recalls that there is no persecution or other specific danger threatening the church at Corinth at the time of his writing these words.

<sup>9</sup> Yet it is temporary only as the age itself is temporary. The society in which it is abolished is not earthly, but heavenly. As an institution it is as permanent as the age. Of that hallucination which has often overtaken good men and induced them to attack marriage, as an unjustifiable conventionality to be outgrown in the progress of civilization, he happily has no trace. Apostolic Christianity is no champion of free love, no matter under what euphemisms it may masquerade.

<sup>10</sup> Gal. 5:16—6:10; 1 Cor. 5:9.

<sup>11</sup> Eph. 5:5; cf. 1 Thess. 4:4 f.

of Nature to assist him in early rising, but Paul made the Christian's union with God's spirit the basis for personal purity. "As for fornication, let it not so much as be named among you!"<sup>12</sup> Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have from God? Glorify God therefore in your body."<sup>13</sup> Nothing gave him more anxiety concerning the churches in Thessalonica and Corinth than the danger that threatened in this regard from heathen society; and the great struggle in which the apostle engaged with the Corinthian church seems to have had one of its main roots in the unwillingness of the church to discipline a member who had broken even the lax conventionalities of heathen society. And it may well be noticed that the apostle demands this chastity of men quite as much as of women. Possibly one might say he was even more insistent upon it because of the attitude of the Græco-Roman mind to which reference has already been made.

Thus the family in the Pauline teachings appears a secondary good. On the whole it was wise, Paul thought, not to establish one for oneself. It is true, to be able to live unmarried was evidence of a special divine charism,<sup>14</sup> but he himself had a right to be married as well as Peter, yet preferred celibacy (or shall we say widowerhood?) and could wish that all men were of the same mind.<sup>15</sup> And this applied to women quite as truly as to men.<sup>16</sup>

#### SECTION II. THE PAULINE CONCEPTION OF THE FAMILY IS ESSENTIALLY THAT OF HIS AGE.

If now we pass from the apostle's treatment of the relation of the sexes to that accorded the family as an institution, we discover at once that he is a true child of his age. His conception of marriage as a purely physical matter, advisable as a means of preventing irregular alliances, could hardly fail to be

<sup>12</sup> Eph. 5 : 3.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. 6 : 19, 20.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Cor. 7 : 7. JACOBY, *Neutestamentliche Ethik*, p. 34, n., refuses to classify the *χάρισμα* of this text with *χαρίσματα* in general. His position seems hardly justifiable in view of the general position of Paul concerning the "gifts." It would seem as if he meant by them special and characteristic powers possessed by various believers, which in accordance with his usual tendency he explained as resulting from the working of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 9 : 5 f.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 7 : 39, 40.

accompanied by frank and unquestioning statements concerning the inferiority of woman in the family. It is true that "in Christ" there was to be no distinction, but not so in the church. There the women were to be silent.<sup>17</sup> They were to remember that the woman was made from man, and not man from the woman;<sup>18</sup> that veils were necessary still on account of the angels.<sup>19</sup> The husband was the head of the wife<sup>20</sup> and, supposedly at least, capable of giving her all such instruction as was needed by the weaker vessel.<sup>21</sup> The wife, finally, was to be subject to her husband.<sup>22</sup>

In his eyes, also, the unmarried woman was subject to her father. He could prevent her marriage, and as a lesser good he could permit it. After becoming a widow, however, the same woman was, in accordance with the spirit of the age, given new rights. She could marry whom she chose, only *ἐν κυρίῳ*, *i. e.*, probably, within the circle of believers.<sup>23</sup> Later advice given in his name makes remarriage obligatory on young widows.<sup>24</sup>

Yet though he might thus treat the family as a secondary good, and though he might thus insist upon Christians conforming to the social conventions of their day, Paul's teaching concerning divorce is that of Jesus himself. The question as to the separation of married persons from unbelieving partners was a very natural one for Christians of the type of those in Corinth, and the matter was treated by Paul explicitly. Again he works from a general principle that is far more important than its particular application. Christians thus married are certainly to maintain the home for the benefit of each other and their children; for the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother; else were their children unclean.<sup>25</sup> Whatever else this last clause may mean,

<sup>17</sup> 1 Cor. 14 : 34, 36.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. 11 : 12.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor. 11 : 10. The meaning of this enigmatic saying is probably to be found in Gen. 6 : 2-4 and the evil which sprang from the union with angels mentioned there.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Cor. 11 : 1-16; Eph. 5 : 23.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor. 14 : 35.

<sup>22</sup> Eph. 5 : 22; Col. 3 : 18; cf. 1 Cor. 7 : 39.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 7 : 36-40; 9 : 5; 2 Cor. 6 : 14.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Tim. 5 : 14.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor. 7 : 14.



it certainly exhibits strikingly Paul's regard for the unity of the home, and especially for the children.<sup>26</sup>

Brought face to face with an actual separation of husband and wife, Paul speaks in the name of Jesus: "the wife shall not depart from her husband, but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband; and let the husband leave not his wife."<sup>27</sup> Here is the one clear instance in which the apostles quote Jesus as an authority in ethical matters, and it is worth attention that it is at the one point at which the social content of Christianity cannot change except for the worse. If there is anything in all the specific social teaching of Paul that may be said to have transcended the historical situation in which it was uttered, it was this concerning the family: the union of a man and woman in marriage is a primal fact of humanity; it is not a matter of contract, it is an actual status. Separation may be permitted, but not remarriage to other persons. Divorce is neither instituted nor permitted by New Testament ethics.<sup>28</sup>

There remains the matter of Paul's directions for the control of the inner relations of the Christian family. These are given so repeatedly as to indicate that the matter was regarded as of first importance. They are not quite in accord with modern ideas in some points, but are clearly such as would have made the Christian family ideal in the society of the first century. In general they are the outcome of the positions already described. Wives were to be in subjection to their husbands;<sup>29</sup> children were to obey their parents; fathers were not to provoke their children to wrath, but to nurture them in the chastening and admonition

<sup>26</sup> On this latter point see also the position taken as to the saving quality of child-bearing, 1 Tim. 2:15; cf. 5:14.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Cor. 7:10, 11.

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noticing that this use of the saying of Jesus by Paul furnishes a critical control of the saying itself. In Matt. 5:32; 19:9 the exception clause *παρεκτός λόγου πορνείας* or *μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ* is found, but not in Mark 10:11 or Luke 16:18. On general critical principles, therefore, the clause would likely be dropped, but the decision is strengthened by the absence of any such exception in the teaching of Paul. Cf. JACOBY, *Neutestamentliche Ethik*, p. 356. To the contrary (mistakenly) MATHEWS, *Social Teaching of Jesus*.

<sup>29</sup> Eph. 5:22 f.

of the Lord.<sup>30</sup> It is not difficult to see in these directions a modification, but not a destruction, of the parental authority so universally recognized in both Jewish and Roman civilization.

To make these essentially local and historical applications of Christianity universal and authoritative in matters of the family is to check the growth of the Christian spirit in social affairs at the limit reached by these civilizations. Such a check, however, so clearly possible only as long as one lived under the control of an eschatological conception soon to be made untenable by the failure of the Christ to return to usher in the expected messianic age, Christian history shows was short-lived. In the family, as in all things, it was the ideal element of Paulinism, not its specific application, that proved permanent. And in these matters, at least, most Christians are agreed. He would be a rare man who would today attempt to make the Pauline teaching as to Corinthian and Ephesian women operative in western Christendom.

But to understand Paul completely one must also consider his attitude toward the family as a social unit, wholly apart from its basis as a union of persons of opposite sexes. It is here that the apostle comes nearest to the thought of Jesus. It will be recalled that with the Master the family became the formal concept of the kingdom. God was Father, disciples sons and therefore brothers, and all who entered the kingdom were to become like little children. Paul, in his less practical moments, when he is dealing with ideals and not with questions of church discipline, has similar expressions. God is a loving Father<sup>31</sup> quite as much as a dread sovereign,<sup>32</sup> and most beautiful of all the Pauline expressions is that in the Ephesian letter, "I bow my knees unto the Father from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named."<sup>33</sup> Other figures fall hardly below this. The church is sometimes conceived of as the bride of Christ; sometimes as a virgin to be kept spotless till the coming of her lord. The man who could so use a social institution can hardly be said

<sup>30</sup> Eph. 6:1 f.; Col. 3:18-25.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:6.

<sup>31</sup> Rom. 8:14-17.

<sup>33</sup> Eph. 3:14, 15.

to have disparaged it, however much he may have regarded it as a secondary good.<sup>34</sup>

If, now, one were to summarize the apostle's teaching as to the family, it would be something like this: Except in the case of divorce, and then under the direct influence of Jesus, Paul did not attempt to introduce any new conception of the family. He rather treated heathen marriage from the Christian point of view, as an institution to be preserved. As a result he held up ideals for families in the Græco-Roman life of the first century. Only in so far as these ideals involve universal principles are they of importance to today's life. Here, as in all social matters, the letter killeth, but the spirit maketh alive. The new Christian life, possessed as it is by the very genius of corporate expression, may well be trusted to work out, within the limits set by these general principles, such particular social institutions as it may judge necessary.

Thus again the application of historical criteria enables us to distinguish the essential and the pedagogic elements of the apostle's thought. Long hair and veils, silence in religious meetings, subjection to their husbands—these are but elements in the apostle's adjustment of the Christian life to a Græco-Roman civilization. So, too, his treatment of marriage as a purely animal survival. Under the domination of a formal and ethnic thought, he undertook to prepare men for another world. In his estimation the present age was hopelessly evil, its surviving animalism and such of its members as did not live according to the spirit, doomed to certain destruction. From this point of view, it was idle to attempt reform or to assist social evolution. Christians, though not to abandon this world, were to live as citizens of another. Thus the family was a matter of but secondary importance, and women, though ideally equal with men, were in point of fact treated as inferior.

In so far as apostolic Christianity was temporal. But in this social teaching Paul was giving but an interpretation of something that he knew and preached as neither Jewish nor temporal;

<sup>34</sup>As a matter of curiosity, it might be added that there is no evidence that the Christian pastors performed wedding ceremonies.

and that something was the Christian life, born of an actual faith in God. This life it was that formed the basis of his moral teachings, and which, he urged, should be allowed to express itself in acts of love to men. Those who held God as Father would treat men and women as equal members of the new fraternity. And it was this essential Christianity in Paul that outgrew the specific social directions of the apostle. In his noble conception of the religious worth and responsibilities of a man's body with all its passions, in his insistence upon love between man and wife, in his refusal to regard marriage as a mere contract capable of dissolution, in his recognition of the rights of children—in a word, in his recognition of the domestic implications of the new moral and religious life, Paul was opening up the permanent force and ideals of all social evolution.

Although, therefore, formally the Pauline ethic was dominated by apocalyptic and eschatological concepts, essentially it remained true to what Jesus meant should be the result of his work—a moral life based upon religion. Formally, therefore, the church was but a group of messianists awaiting a kingdom that never came and indifferent to all customs of society except those that were evil; essentially the church was a group of men and women endeavoring to let the new religious and ethical life that had come to them through accepting Jesus as Christ express itself in the family and all other social relations.

And the life lived. Jesus was greater than the men who interpreted him, even when they interpreted him aright, and it is he and his work that we can now see formed the strength of historical Christianity. The new life must needs be expressed in, but it could not be reduced to, temporary vocabularies and concepts. It conquered them—the mighty systems of an Augustine, an Origen, a Justin, even of a Paul. And thus inevitably, because it was the social expression of a life, the church became the parent of a Christian civilization; the Christian woman of a Græco-Roman civilization became the Christian woman of a Christian civilization, and the Christian family of the first century grew into the Christian family of today.